

# Guest Editors' introduction to the group submission: "Silver Linings"

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Jean-Marie Guyau (1854-88), once a lecturer in philosophy at the Lycée Condorcet in Paris, spent the better part of his short career writing a book on the theory of time. In it he notes the impatience of youth, their lives lived bulging at the seams, while old age "by contrast, is more like the unchanging scenery of the classical theatre, a simple place, sometimes a true unity of time, place and action that concentrates everything round one dominant activity and expunges the rest" (cf Draaisma 2004: 207). Guyau was illustrating the narrowing of life in the autumn years; the dispensing with, perhaps, things one has come to realize are unnecessary, but also the resignation that ones brightest, beautiful and bold years have long since passed.

One comes, then, to expect very little in old age, or from the elderly. The collection of papers here highlights an alternative stage in which people are not only exhibiting powerful and colorful agency in their later years, but also are doing so with little regard for the diminutive expectations the world holds for them. What is it that inspires seniors to challenge the standard tropes of senior citizenship?

These papers aspire to focus our attention on the ways in which older people depart from the socially defined roles of later life. We expect youth to cross boundaries, take risks, challenge themselves and the cultural institutions around them, not the aged. Certainly the public eye is drawn more to youth movements and actions. However, with the world poised, in the next two decades, to experience its largest increase in the elderly population, how we treat aging and the decisions and actions of the elderly will be critical. Aging is framed by a common terrain of shifting physical health (itself a very individual experience) while marked by class, gender, race

and place. Still, many seniors creatively navigate the 'third age.' Some find that their time, no longer tied so strictly to work and family, becomes truly their own and they turn to rejuvenating old interests or forging new ones. Others resist being moved, literally and figuratively, to the margins of society and strive to make their voices and opinions heard. As seniors see their social and political influence diminish in youth-obsessed cultures some find new strength and meaning in lives that include activism, migration, a new physicality, renegotiating their identity and carving out a new cultural and physical presence in their communities. Such analyses demand attention to the gendered dimensions of later life and we consider them here.

This group of articles looks at these issues in a variety of contemporary contexts. Robbins-Ruszkowski examines Universities of the Third Age as sites which offer alternatives to dominant discourses about aging in contemporary Poland. The Argentine elders DuBois describes engage in political activism in attempts to alter policies with respect to retirees, but also as an end in itself. Gambold's study of older women who retire abroad to Mexico and France shows how these women use international retirement as a way to live old age differently. The articles thus describe older people actively engaged in redefining what it means to be old.

## REFERENCES

Draaisma, Douwe 2004. *Why Life Speeds Up As You Get Older: How memory shapes our past.* Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

